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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/21/2018

TAGS: PREL PHUM SY CA

SUBJECT: STRONG CANADIAN DEMARCHE ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN SYRIA

REF: A. OTTAWA 222

1B. OTTAWA 172

1C. OTTAWA 0024

1D. 07 STATE 171106

Classified By: PolMinCouns Scott Bellard, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) According to Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) Middle East Division Director Michael Grant, DFAIT on February 20 summoned Syrian Ambassador to Canada Jamil Sakr to receive a strongly worded aide memoire expressing "deep concerns" over the human rights situation in Syria and the status of detained peace activists Kamala Labwani, Anwar al-Bunni, Michel Kilo, and Mahmoud 'Issa, as well as calling on Syria to live up to its 'binding obligation" under the International Covenant on civil and Political Rights and to take "concrete steps to stop attacks on peaceful political and human rights activists." (Full text in para 3.) Grant indicated that Ambassador Sakr offered no substantive response -- nor had DFAIT expected him to -- but that Damascus would likely react.

12. (C) Comment: This demarche escalates the intensity of recent bilateral exchanges on human rights (refs a-c) and lives up to our request for such action (ref d). Canada remains a strong partner of the U.S. in our quest to promote and protect human rights around the world. End Comment

13. (C) Begin Text

Canada is disturbed by the systemic lack of respect for basic human rights in Syria. As a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other international human rights instruments, Syria is under a binding obligation to take all possible steps to ensure that its domestic law and practices are in keeping with its international human rights commitments. Canada calls upon Syria to live up to these commitments.

Canada is alarmed by the recent arrests of peaceful civil society activists associated with the "Damascus Declaration".

These arrests are yet another example of human rights violation and they have renewed Canada's deep concerns over the human rights situation in Syria.

We remain concerned about the situation of all peaceful activists who remain in detention, including Kamal Labwani, Anwar al-Bunni, Michel Kilo and Mahmoud 'Issa.

Canada calls upon Syria to address urgently the situation of these and other political detainees, in keeping with Syria's international human rights obligations under Articles 9 (arbitrary arrest and detention), 12 (freedom of movement), 14 (minimum guarantees for judicial proceedings), 19 (freedom of opinion and expression) and 22 (freedom of association) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Canada encourages Syria to take firm measures to combat

practices of arbitrary arrest, incommunicado detention, torture and cruel and degrading treatment. Canada encourages Syria to ensure thorough investigation into allegations of these practices, prosecution of perpetrators and remedies for victims.

Canada also encourages Syria to take concrete steps to stop attacks on peaceful political and human rights activists, including by putting in place adequate protections for the universal freedoms of movement, expression, assembly and association.

Finally, Canada calls on Syria to review the application of the Emergency Law that has been in place for 44 years, and is often invoked as the justification for suspension of civil liberties.

Canada's ongoing concerns about the human rights situation in Syria stem from a common responsibility to ensure the broadest possible enjoyment of the rights guarantees in international instruments.

International human rights instruments apply equally to all states party, and Canada follows closely the human rights situation in all countries. Where Canada has concerns, we express these concerns in different ways -- in public or in private -- depending on the channels available and the nature of our bilateral relationship.

19 February 2008.

End text

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